

## **MINUTES**

### **Attendance**

Members Present: Bruce Carson, Jonathan O'Keeffe

Members Absent:

Select Board Liaison: Diana Stein

Planning Department Staff: Jonathan Tucker, Christine Brestrup

Other Planning Board Members: Denise Barberet, David Webber

Members of the public identified below

### **Discussion**

The meeting was called to order at 5:05 PM.

Mr. O'Keeffe opened the meeting by giving an overview of the zoning process and timetable, and highlighting the key priorities for Fall Town Meeting (replacement of the Phased Growth bylaw and zoning changes for the Main/High/Dickinson neighborhood). He explained the purpose of the Zoning Subcommittee's semi-annual Zoning Forums, which is to hear input from members of the public regarding their priorities on the zoning process. He explained that the Subcommittee would not be considering the details and merits of various proposals at this meeting, but rather that the primary intent of the meeting was to give the public a chance to provide feedback. After the introduction, Mr. O'Keeffe opened the discussion to the public.

Hilda Greenbaum noted that she didn't see the need for the \$50K capital appropriation for Master Plan implementation, and also inquired as to the status of public input from the Subcommittee's session on Main/High/Dickinson neighborhood rezoning.

Molly Turner stated that she doesn't approve of the push to develop PRP properties, as they are not connected to Village Centers.

Connie Kruger stated that she felt that medical offices should be allowed in the PRP, that she hasn't seen much traffic on Larkspur Drive, and that the town needs to increase its commercial tax base.

Walter Wolnik mentioned an idea raised by Ms. Greenbaum regarding regulating residential density based on the number of bedrooms rather than the number of dwelling units. Ms. Greenbaum elaborated, explaining that managing apartments with large numbers of bedrooms is difficult. She also stated that she felt that if medical offices are allowed in the PRP district, they should be regulated by Special Permit (SP) rather than Site Plan Review (SPR).

John Coull reviewed counts of traffic that he had done on his own residential street (Sheerman Lane), noting that a substantial amount of the traffic came from residents themselves and service vehicles travelling to residential dwellings.

Nancy Hamel stated that she felt medical offices should be allowed in the PRP district, and that as a professional Realtor, she saw continuing demand for residential property on Larkspur despite its proximity to the PRP district, explaining that she had just recently sold a house there.

Carol Gray said that doctors' offices should not be allowed in the PRP district, and said that she had a memo from the Planning Department promising that medical offices would not be allowed there. She said that the existing conditions were preferable, and should be preserved. She also asked that items on the Subcommittee's Work Plan should include more explanatory detail. She

asked that a regulation be developed requiring affordable units as part of residential developments. She also stated farmland and the environment should be protected, that the Subcommittee should look for inappropriately-zoned high-density areas in outlying areas, that economic impact statements should be required as part of all development, and asked about the role of the consultant proposed under the capital appropriation.

Fred Hartwell spoke in opposition to the proposal to adjust dimensional regulations in the R-G and R-VC districts to encourage infill development, stating that there should be limits on residential density in the R-G district, and that any changes should be approached carefully.

Chris Riddle noted that most people would consider medical offices to be the same as professional offices in terms of their impact on abutters, and they should be allowed in the PRP district. He also spoke in support of proposals to encourage green roofs and permeable paving in development projects.

Peter McConnell stated that the Zoning Bylaw was too complicated, and that people shouldn't need to consult with Town Counsel to interpret the bylaw. He said that the bylaw should be made clearer, and also that he supported medical offices in the PRP district.

Patty Ramsey stated that PRP regulations have changed since she bought her house on Larkspur Drive in 1992, with creeping changes in what is allowed there. She stated that medical offices should not be allowed under any circumstances, even with SP.

Clare Bertrand encouraged the Subcommittee and the Planning Board to complete its work on the Master Plan in a timely manner.

Paula Russell stated that she lives on Larkspur Drive immediately adjacent to the PRP district, and doesn't like creeping changes in development regulations there. She noted the success of the Hart and Patterson building in the PRP district, and stated that she felt that this project has worked out acceptably. She stated that the East Amherst PRP is the only PRP surrounded by residential development, and expressed concern about medical offices on the scale of Valley Medical being located at the end of Larkspur Drive.

Mike Jacques encouraged the board to fix the zoning bylaws so that they are understandable to the public. He also noted that his wife is a doctor, who typically sees between 20 and 24 patients per day.

Mary Streeter said that the Subcommittee needs to take a long view of the traffic situation, considering what the traffic would be like if nine to twelve buildings were developed on the property. She suggested the possibility of a tiered structure in the PRP district, with different intensity levels for different PRP areas, and stated that medical offices, if allowed at all, should only be allowed by SP.

Tony Maroulis noted that the discussion about the PRP is broader than the specific question of the New England Environmental project. He also expressed support for clarifying the complex zoning bylaw, and encouraged increased residential density downtown and in village centers.

Claire Norton discussed the relative lack of general practitioner physicians in Amherst, and stated more locations for them to locate would be a positive development. She noted that doctors can already have individual offices in their homes as an accessory use, and stated that she felt that if this use was appropriate for a home in a residential district, it should also be appropriate in the PRP district. She also spoke in favor of regulations to encourage the growth of the tax base, stating that existing high tax rates price lower income people out of the town.

Diana Stein asked whether federal stimulus funds could be used to encourage brownfields development.

Leigh Andrews noted that spinoffs from the University of Massachusetts in areas such as nanotechnology and polymer science are looking for space that the existing zoning bylaw does not readily accommodate, and that the bylaw should be revised to encourage the provision of facilities for this type of enterprise.

Julie Marcus spoke in favor of encouraging green roofs and permeable paving, technologies that she is using in her New England Environmental project. She stated that the PRP in East Amherst opens onto Old Belchertown Road, not Larkspur Drive, and that the existing traffic patterns on Research Drive would remain in place if medical offices were allowed in the development on Research Drive. She noted that the downtown area cannot meet the needs of every business looking for space in town.

Walter Wolnik expressed support for putting performance standards in place in the bylaw, for encouraging the creation of 40R and 40S districts, and noted that Easthampton currently requires performance bonding.

Carol Gray stated that SP was preferable to SPR. She also said that zoning was for the common good rather than for individual gain, and that the Subcommittee should think long-term in its approach to zoning issues. She expressed support for brownfields regulations and a local historic district.

Julie Marcus noted that many of the existing uses allowed by-right in the PRP district could create much higher impacts than medical offices would.

Barry Elkington stated that the primary users of Larkspur Drive to access the PRP district are Amherst Woods residents, and that most other people enter through Old Belchertown Road.

Reed Elkington stated that everyone in town shares an interest in the development and success of the PRP district, not just property owners there.

Mary Streeter suggested regulations that would require two-story development in village centers. She also pointed out that portions of the East Amherst PRP apart from Research Drive do open onto Larkspur Drive.

David Bryne said that he felt that the New England Environmental project was out of character for its neighborhood, and that if medical offices are allowed in the PRP, there should be a tight limit on the number of doctors allowed.

Alan Powell asked about the source of complexity in the bylaw.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan O'Keeffe, Subcommittee member

[Minutes approved 8/19/09]